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MANY SEE RELIGION'S INFLUENCE CONTINUING TO INCREASE

PRINCETON, N.J. — The number of Americans who believe religion is increasing its influence on American life continues at the highest level recorded in nearly three decades of measurements. Nearly half, 48%, say religion is gaining in impact while 39% hold the opposite view, 6% say the same and 7% do not express an opinion.

The percentage saying "increasing" is more than three times the proportion recorded in 1969 when 14% said religion was increasing its influence and 70% said losing. When this index was started in 1957, 69% saw religion gaining influence on American life while far fewer, 14%, said losing.

Most likely to say religion's influence is growing are young adults (18–29 years), persons with a college background, Southerners and Westerners, and evangelicals.

Following is the trend, with the proportions saying "the same" or "no opinion" excluded.

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON AMERICAN LIFE

	Increasing %	Losing %
1986	48	39
1985	49	39
1984	42	39
1983	44	42
1981	38	46
1980	35	46
1978	37	48
1977	36	45
1976	44	45
1975	39	51
1974	31	56
1970	14	75
1969	14	70
1968	18	67
1967	23	57
1965	33	45
1962	45	31
1957	69	14

Comparison of the current findings with those in 1970, when only 14% said religion was increasing its influence, shows the change to have occurred more or less equally among all major population groups.

Following is the question that has been asked in surveys during the last three decades:

At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?

Kenneth Briggs

KENNETH BRIGGS TO WRITE REGULAR COLUMN IN EMERGING TRENDS

I am pleased to announce that Kenneth Briggs will serve as a consultant to the Princeton Religion Research Center and will also write a regular column in *Emerging Trends*.

As he begins his new assignment, Briggs notes:

> For many years, as religion editor of the New York Times, I was a beneficiary of the PRRC and Emerging Trends. As a student of American church history, I am pursuing that professional line of inquiry. At the same time I am an ordained United Methodist with a keen interest in how social research contributes to the health and welfare of religious groups.
>
> — George Gallup, Jr.

Teen Supernatural Beliefs on Decline

Although many teens still believe in such supernatural phenomena as angels, astrology and extrasensory perception (ESP), fewer now believe in clairvoyance, witchcraft, Bigfoot, ghosts, or the Loch Ness monster, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

Belief in angels has declined slightly, from 69 percent in 1984 to 67 percent in 1986. Among those who attend church regularly, three in four (76 percent) believe in angels, but only 56 percent of those who do not attend regularly share this belief. Protestant teens are more likely than Catholics to believe in angels, by a margin of 74 percent to 60 percent.

Even though the scientific community generally dismisses astrology as being without scientific merit, a majority of teens (52 percent) persist in believing that the movement of the heavenly bodies can influence events in their lives. Young women (58 percent) are more likely than young men (48 percent) to believe in astrology. Also, belief is slightly greater among younger teens (ages 13 to 15) than among those who are 16 or 17 years old, by a margin of 54 percent to 51 percent.

In spite of scientific skepticism about ESP, 46 percent of the teens still believe in its possible existence. This proportion, however, represents a sharp decline in belief in ESP, from 59 percent in 1984 and 67 percent in 1978.

Clairvoyance, the ability to see into the future or beyond normal sensory range, is thought to exist by about one teen in five (19 percent). Belief in clairvoyance has declined 9 percentage points since 1984, when 28 percent of all teens believed in its existence. Most likely now to believe in clairvoyance are young women (22 percent) and older teens (22 percent).

Ghosts and witches would probably be horrified to find that fewer and fewer teens believe in their existence. Belief in witchcraft has declined, from 25 percent in 1978 to 19 percent in 1986. Only 15 percent of teens now say they believe in ghosts, compared with 20 percent who expressed such belief in 1978. Young women and older teens are the most likely to believe in both witchcraft (22 percent) and ghosts (17 percent).

Belief among teens in larger-than-life creatures such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness monster has also declined sharply. Only 16 percent of the teens now believe in Bigfoot, compared with the 40 percent who believed in 1978. In 1978, 31 percent of the teens believed in Scotland's Loch Ness monster, but now only 13 percent believe in "Nessie."

Young men (20 percent) are about twice as likely as young women (11 percent) to think that Bigfoot may be roaming the Pacific Northwest or the foothills of the Himalayas. Young men (17 percent) are also more likely than young women (9 percent) to argue for the existence of the Loch Ness monster.

Teen opinions were measured by responses to the following questions: *Which of the following do you believe in — ghosts, the Loch Ness monster, Sasquatch (Bigfoot), witchcraft, ESP, clairvoyance, angels, astrology?*

The results reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 504 teen-agers, 13 to 17, conducted in May and June 1986.

TRENDS IN BELIEFS

	1986	1984	1978
Angels	67%	69%	64%
Astrology	52	55	40
ESP	46	59	67
Clairvoyance	19	28	25
Witchcraft	19	22	25
Bigfoot	16	24	40
Ghosts	15	20	20
Loch Ness Monster	13	18	31

SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS	National	Male	Female	Ages 13–15	Ages 16–17
Angels	67%	65%	68%	68%	67%
Astrology	52	48	58	54	51
ESP	46	47	45	47	45
Clairvoyance	19	19	20	21	16
Witchcraft	19	17	22	17	22
Bigfoot	16	20	11	15	17
Ghosts	15	13	17	13	17
Loch Ness Monster	13	17	9	14	12

Views of Catholics on Sexual Morality

In a climate of widely-publicized conflicts between liberal U.S. Catholic theologians and the Vatican, a majority of American Catholic laity would like their Church to adopt more flexible policies on sexual morality to reflect trends in the modern world.

In the latest Gallup Poll, 57% of Roman Catholics say their Church should change its official position while 36% believe the Church should adhere to its present policies on sexual morals.

The impetus for change comes mainly from Catholics who are less active in religious activities than from "practicing" Catholics, defined as Church members who attend Mass weekly and who describe religion as very important in their lives.

Among "practicing" Catholics, who comprise about half the total Catholic sample, public opinion is evenly divided between those who believe the Church should (46%) and should not (45%) change its position on sexual morality.

Among "non-practicing" Catholics, the heavy weight of opinion favors the Church's changing its stance to reflect trends in the modern world, 68% to 26%.

CURRAN'S LICENSE REVOKED

The survey was conducted shortly after the Vatican revoked the license of The Rev. Charles Curran, a Roman Catholic priest and university professor of theology, because his teachings on homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and other moral issues were at variance with Catholic dogma.

Among all Catholics in the survey, those who disagree with the Vatican's decision to censure Curran (45%) slightly outnumber those who agree (32%) with a large 23% undecided.

Attitudes toward the Curran case, as on the broader issue of the Church's position on sexual morality, reveal a dichotomy between the views of practicing and non-practicing Catholics.

Among practicing Catholics, 47% agree with the Vatican's decision while 30% disagree and 23% are undecided. Among the non-practicing group, only 16% agree while 61% disagree and, again, 23% are undecided.

Following are the questions asked and the key findings in table form:

Some people say that the official position of the Catholic Church on sexual morals should not be changed. Others say that this position should be changed to reflect trends in the modern world. Which point of view more closely reflects your own opinion?

CHURCH'S STANCE ON SEXUAL MORALS

	All Catholics	Practicing*	Non-practicing
Should change	57%	46%	68%
Should not	36	45	26
No opinion	7	9	6
	100%	100%	100%

A Roman Catholic priest and professor of theology has been forbidden by the Vatican to teach theology on the basis that his teachings on sexual morals varied from the Vatican's official position. Have you heard or read about this?

About half of all Catholics (54%) are aware of the situation – including 69% of practicing and 39% of non-practicing Catholics.

All Catholics were then asked:

Do you agree or disagree with the Vatican's decision?

Here are the results:

VATICAN'S DECISION

	All Catholics	Practicing*	Non-practicing
Agree	32%	47%	16%
Disagree	45	30	61
No opinion	23	23	23
	100%	100%	100%

*Church members who attended Mass during the 7 days prior to being interviewed and who describe religion as very important in their lives.

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with 264 Roman Catholics, out of a total sample of 978 adults, 18 and older, conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period September 3–17. For results based on the total Catholic subsample, one can say that 19 times out of 20 the error attributable to sampling and other random effects should not exceed 8 percentage points in either direction. For results based on the subsamples of practicing and non-practicing Catholics, an allowance of plus or minus 11 percentage points should be made for sampling error.

Many Teens Turning to the Bible

The Bible is near the top of many teens' book lists. A majority of American teens (58 percent) say they read the Bible at least montly, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

This finding represents a slight increase in Bible reading since 1983, when 55 percent of all teens reported reading the Good Book at least monthly.

One teen in 10 (10 percent) reports reading the Bible daily. In addition, 30 percent of the teens say they read the Bible at least once a week. Monthly Bible reading is reported by 18 percent of the teens, but 22 percent say they read it less often than once a month. One teen in five (20 percent) says he rarely or never reads the Bible.

Not surprisingly, a majority of regular church attenders (58 percent) say they read the Bible at least weekly. This high incidence may include some teens who are reading the Bible only as part of church services.

Among those not attending church regularly, 17 percent say they still read the Bible at least weekly. The majority, however, say they read it only monthly (20 percent), less than montly (29 percent), or rarely or never (34 percent).

Protestant youths are far more likely than Catholic teens to report frequent Bible reading. The majority of Protestant teens (54 percent) say they read the Bible at least weekly, compared with only 22 percent of the Catholics who say they read it as frequently. This finding probably reflects the emphasis placed upon Bible reading and study by many Protestant denominations.

Regionally, the highest level of Bible readership is found in the South, where a majority of teens (57 percent) say they read the Bible at least weekly. Frequent readership is reported by 40 percent of the teens in the West and by 36 percent of those in the Midwest, but only 24 percent of the teens residing in the East say they read the Bible at least weekly. Non readership is highest on the coasts, with 38 percent of teens in the East and 29 percent in the West saying they rarely or never read the Bible.

Young women (47 percent) are more likely than young men (33 percent) to report that they read the Bible at least weekly. Among teens who are 13 to 15 years of age, frequent Bible reading is reported more often than it is by those who are 16 or older, by a margin of 45 percent to 34 percent.

According to family background, teens from blue-collar families (44 percent) are more likely than those from white-collar households (36 percent) to report frequent Bible readership.

Above-average students (43 percent) are only slightly more likely than those who are doing average or below-average work in school (37 percent) to say that they read the Bible frequently.

The survey results (see page 5) were obtained by asking:

How often do you read the Bible?

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 504 teen-agers, 13 to 17, conducted in May and June 1986.

* * *

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* * *

IMPORTANCE OF GOD IN LIVES

Asked to indicate the importance of God in their lives, the people of Malta score highest among the 24 nations surveyed since 1981 by the European Value Systems Group (with the findings disseminated by the British Gallup Poll).

Next highest on the 10-point scale are the Mexicans. Those least likely to indicate that God is important in their lives are the Swedes. Here are the complete results:

IMPORTANCE OF GOD IN LIFE
(Scale of 1 to 10)

Malta	9.58
Mexico	8.98
Chile	8.61
South Africa	
Whites	8.55
Blacks	8.45
USA	
National	8.21
Blacks	9.04
Hispanics	8.92
Republic of Ireland	8.02
Northern Ireland	7.49
Canada	7.36
Italy	6.96
Iceland	6.60
Spain	6.39
Australia	6.22
Finland	6.20
Belgium	5.94
Great Britain	5.72
West Germany	5.67
South Korea	5.42
Norway	5.35
Netherlands	5.33
Hungary	4.84
Japan	4.83
France	4.72
Denmark	4.47
Sweden	3.99

FREQUENCY OF BIBLE READING AMONG U.S. TEEN-AGERS

	Daily	At least weekly	At least monthly	Less than monthly	Rarely or never
NATIONAL	10%	30%	18%	22%	20%
Male	7	26	20	27	20
Female	14	33	15	18	20
Ages 13 to 15	11	34	17	20	18
Ages 16 to 18	10	24	18	26	22
Regular church attenders	17	41	15	18	9
Non-regular church attenders	2	15	20	29	34
Protestants	16	38	18	18	10
Catholics	3	19	22	34	22
Above-average students	12	31	19	21	17
Average or below	9	28	16	24	23
White-collar family background	7	29	17	22	25
Blue-collar family background	14	30	18	23	15
East	6	18	14	34	28
Midwest	7	29	20	29	15
South	17	40	19	13	11
West	10	30	17	14	29

Americans Favor Religious Studies In the Public Schools

By overwhelming margins, the American people favor having the public schools offer a variety of religious studies. These include elective Bible study courses, use of the Bible in literature, history and social studies classes, and comparative religion courses. In addition, a large majority favors making school facilities available for use by student religious groups during non-school hours.

Unlike school prayer, which the Supreme Court has prohibited on constitutional grounds, the activities covered in the latest Gallup Poll are permissable under the First Amendment.

Heavy Support in All Regions

The survey found no significant difference in public opinion about the schools' participation in each activity, with 79% expressing no objection to teaching about the world's major religions, 75% (each) to using the Bible in conjunction with secular studies and offering Bible study courses, and 74% to making school facilities available for the use of student religious organizations. Similarly, the percent who would object to each of these actions ranges only between 16% and 21% nationwide. Heavy public support for each of the activities studied is found in all regions of the nation and among all major population groups.

With the exception of comparative religion courses, to which no more than 1 in 6 in any group objects, college graduates are slightly more likely than those with less formal education to resist having the schools pursue the activities studied. However, support heavily outweighs opposition among college graduates as well as non-graduates.

One-Third Read Bible at Least Weekly

The survey found that one-third of adult Americans (33%) read the Bible at least once a week, with 1 in 9 a daily reader. In addition, 1 in 7 (14%) reads the Bible at least once a month, about 1 in 4 (26%) is a less frequent reader, 1 in 5 (22%) never reads, and 5% are uncommitted. These figures are virtually unchanged from earlier surveys, as shown in the table.

Following are the questions asked and the major findings in table form:

Here are some questions about the Bible, including both the Old and New Testaments. Please tell me whether you would or would not object to the public schools . . . ?

RELIGIOUS STUDIES, ACTIVITIES

	Would not object %	Would object %	No opinion %
Teaching about the major religions of the world?	79	16	5
Using the Bible in literature, history and social studies classes?	75	20	5
Making facilities available after school hours for use by student religious groups or organizations?	74	21	5
Offering elective courses in Bible studies?	75	20	5

How often do you read the Bible?

Here is the trend:

BIBLE READING

	1986	1982	1978
More than once a day	1%	2%	1%
Daily	10	13	11
2 or 3 times a week	9	9	8
Weekly	13	9	10
2 or 3 times a month	6	5	4
Once a month	8	7	7
Less than once a month	26	25	28
Never read	22	24	24
Can't say	5	6	7
	100%	100%	100%

As shown in the following table, women, blacks, older people, the less-well educated, Protestants, evangelicals, and Southerners are more inclined to read the Bible and to read it more often:

Bible Reading - 1986*

	Daily %	Weekly %	Monthly %	Less than monthly %	Never %
NATIONWIDE	11	22	14	26	22
Men	8	18	12	30	27
Women	15	25	16	22	17
Whites	11	21	14	26	23
Blacks	17	31	12	21	15
18–29 years	8	17	16	28	27
30–49 years	9	21	15	29	21
50 & older	17	26	11	21	20
College grads.	8	21	11	32	23
College inc.	8	21	17	25	25
High school grads.	14	20	14	25	23
Not H.S grads.	15	25	12	23	18
Protestants	18	27	15	23	12
Catholics	4	16	13	32	31
Evangelicals	28	37	15	15	4
Non-evangelicals	4	15	13	31	30
East	10	17	12	28	30
Midwest	10	20	13	31	18
South	16	27	18	20	15
West	8	21	12	26	28

* "Can't say," 5% nationwide, omitted.

The latest survey was conducted by The Gallup Poll as a public service, in conjunction with The Laymen's National Bible Committee.

The findings are based on in-person interviews with 1,559 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period Oct. 24–27.

For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction. In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and other practical difficulites in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *These statements conform to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

CAN RELIGION ANSWER WORLD PROBLEMS?

The survey shows a 57% majority holding the belief that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, while 23% disagree. Another 20% are undecided. The current percentage saying religion can answer problems is marginally down from last year's 61% and is far below the peak figure in 1957, when fully 81% said religion could answer the problems of the world.

Following is the trend:

CAN RELIGION ANSWER PROBLEMS?

	Can answer	Out of date	No opinion
	%	%	%
1986	57	23	20
1985	61	22	17
1984	56	21	23
1982	60	22	18
1981	65	15	20
1974	62	20	18
1957	81	7	12

Most inclined to believe that religion can answer today's problems are women, blacks, persons 50 and older, Southerners, and evangelicals.

The current findings are based on telephone interviews with 978 adults, 18 and older, conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period Sept. 3–17. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 4 percentage points in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and other practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Following is the question:

Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date?

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PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER
P.O. Box 310
53 Bank Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542

Ms. Jeanne Long
Cong. Info. Serv.
4520 East-West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814

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